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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001386

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: US AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT ORCHESTRATED
PROTESTS

REF: CARACAS 01353

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Classified By: Political Counselor Robin D. Meyer
for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador was greeted with government orchestrated resistance and/or protests during trips to the western states of Zulia, Falcon, Merida and Trujillo. During October 4-8 visits to Zulia, a pro-Government media blog criticized the Ambassador's trip to the opposition controlled oil-city of Maracaibo. In Falcon state, pro-Government protesters called the Ambassador's visit to Coro "a provocation." The Ambassador's October 26 visit to the University of the Andes in Merida was blocked by anti-US demonstrations, flag burning, and incendiary rhetoric, orchestrated by pro-Chavez Merida Governor Marcos Diaz Orellana. In Trujillo state, protesters delayed the opening of an American Corner. The refusal of pro-Chavez Governors and Mayors to meet with the Ambassador calls into question the willingness of the Venezuelan Government (GBRV) to normalize relations. End Summary.

MARACAIBO: RHETORIC BEGINS

¶2. (SBU) Following Ambassador Duddy's visit with opposition Governor Perez in Maracaibo on October 8, commentator Carlo Maglione, in the Chavista website Aporrea.org, questioned the value of any diplomatic relations with the United States. Maglione attributed U.S. interest in Zulia to a goal of fomenting a secessionist movement to create a sparsely populated, resource rich country out of Zulia and Colombia's northern Santander and Guajira regions. Maglione concluded that "the return of Ambassador Duddy has brought the return of the CIA and military attaches to improve relationships with sell-outs, lackeys and pawns."

¶3. (C) In Falcon state, the pro-Chavez Mayor of Coro, Oswaldo Rodriguez Leon, cordially received the Ambassador on October 8. (Note: The Mayor's office had originally agreed to the meeting, but then, the night before, insisted that Leon could only meet with the Ambassador if he had permission from the Foreign Ministry first. The meeting was only secured through a diplomatic note informing the Foreign Ministry of this previously arranged meeting; and the Foreign Ministry's subsequent approval. End note.) While the courtesy call was cordial in nature and the Mayor expressed his admiration for the United States, the encounter was also photographed and videotaped by members of Leon's staff. After the Ambassador's October 9 departure from the city,

approximately two dozen Chavistas in Coro protested the Ambassador's visit calling it "a provocation." (Reftel)

GOVERNOR ORCHESTRATED DEMONSTRATION AND BURNING OF US FLAGS

¶4. (C) On October 26, during the Ambassador's visit to the Andean state of Merida, pro-Chavez Governor Marcos Diaz Orellana declined the Embassy's written request or subsequent telephone calls regarding a courtesy call. The local newspaper, Frontera, featured an article signed by pro-government journalist Julio Carrillo, denouncing the visit and calling the Ambassador "an enemy of the Venezuelan people." The article asserted that, "This man comes representing the government of the USA, a government that exercises hegemonic influence, installs dictators, invades poor countries and brainwashes Latin American militaries to massacre their own people." The article called on demonstrators to gather at the Bolivar Plaza "to reject and denounce the bad children of Venezuela who shield themselves in the opposition and desire to bathe in the blood of the country and give our resources to the U.S. empire."

¶5. (C) The Ambassador was warmly received by opposition Merida Mayor Lester Rodriguez Herrera in an early morning meeting, however approximately 200-300 demonstrators prevented the Ambassador from attending a ceremony at the University of the Andes (ULA) at which the Ambassador was scheduled to be given an award. Protesters burned American flags, denounced the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement, and shouted anti-American slogans. Media coverage of the event show Merida Governor Marcos Diaz Orellana encouraging protesters to denounce the US and holding a burning US flag.

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INAUGURATION OF AMERICAN CORNER BLOCKED BY PROTESTERS

¶6. (C) A similar pattern of interference occurred during the Ambassador's October 27 visit to Trujillo state, where plans to inaugurate an American Corner had to be canceled after approximately 50-60 pro-government protesters in the town of Valera blocked access to the building where the ceremony was scheduled to occur. Protesters carried professionally produced banners against the US presence in Colombia and shouted, "They shall not pass," and "Piti-Yankee Out." Following RSO recommendations, the Ambassador return to his nearby hotel. (Note: On October 28, the Ambassador traveled to the American Corner in the early morning, successfully inaugurating the center in a low-key ceremony prior to his departure from the city. End Note.) As in Merida, the pro-Chavez Governor of Trujillo, Hugo Cabezas Bracamonte never answered the Embassy's written request for a courtesy call. The pro-Chavez Mayor of Valera Temistocles Cabezas, who had been invited to a dinner at the home of a local university rector welcoming the Ambassador to Trujillo, did not attend.

¶7. (C) Comment: The local government-orchestrated demonstrations in these two regional capitals blocked two of the Ambassador's appointments and again calls into question the willingness of Venezuela to normalize our bilateral relations. Despite the protests most local reporting on the Ambassador's travels has been very positive. End Comment.

DUDDY